



NEWS

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See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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RECORD NUMBER OF CONSUMERS CALL FCC'S HELP LINE FOR ASSISTANCE IN RESPONSE TO DTV "SOFT TEST" *Help Line Receives More Than 55,000 Calls from Consumers*

Washington, D.C. – A coordinated nationwide “soft test” designed to encourage consumers to take immediate action to prepare for the June 12 digital television (DTV) transition prompted a single-day record of 55,000 calls to the Federal Communications Commission’s national help line Thursday. Prior to the soft test, on average the Commission’s help line had received approximately 15,000 calls per day since May 1.

More than 125 of the nation’s broadcast markets participated in the soft test, including at least one station in each of the top 30 broadcast markets. During the test, affected viewers were directed to call the FCC’s national toll-free help line, 1-888-CALL-FCC, if they needed assistance in preparing for the impending termination of analog service.

The most common issues raised by consumers who spoke with an agent included the following:

1. Seeking information about the government’s program providing \$40 coupons for the purchase of DTV converter boxes (51%);
2. Expressing concern about reception issues in their area (15%); and
3. Needing instructions to install a digital converter box (10%).

The Chicago media market generated the highest volume of calls – 1,310 – followed by the New York media market with 1,277 calls and the Dallas-Ft. Worth media market with 764 calls. A complete list of the markets posting the highest number of calls to the help line can be found at the FCC’s on-line media tool kit at http://www.dtv.gov/media_toolkit.html.

“This soft test did exactly what it was supposed to do,” said Acting FCC Chairman Michael Copps. “It was a wake-up call for consumers who are unprepared, alerting them to the fact that they need to take the necessary steps before the June 12 DTV transition.”

The FCC’s help line provides consumers with a wide range of services, including instructions on how to install converter boxes and information on local DTV education events and the availability of in-home installation services. In addition to calling the FCC’s toll-free help line, consumers can find help at the FCC’s web site, www.dtv.gov, and by visiting walk-in

help centers being set up across the country or attending a DTV transition event. Information about local events also can be found on the web site.

A “soft test” simulates to a degree what unprepared viewers will experience when the DTV transition occurs. Instead of completely cutting off the analog signal, during a soft test broadcasters interrupt the regular programming of viewers receiving analog signals to warn them the interruption indicates they are not prepared for the transition. Such viewers – other than those connected to a subscription TV service such as cable or satellite (which in some cases still utilize a broadcaster’s analog signal) – must take immediate action to avoid a complete loss of service on June 12. Digital broadcasts are available now and are not interrupted by soft tests.

Nationwide, Nielsen estimates that about 3.3 million households – 2.9 percent of U.S. households with TVs – remained unready for the transition as of May 10. In the few weeks remaining before the transition, the FCC is gearing up its ongoing consumer assistance efforts to ensure consumers are prepared for the end of analog broadcast service for full-power television stations.

The switch to digital will reward most viewers with better sound, a better picture, more channels and more programs and will make room for the future by clearing airwaves for advanced mobile Internet services. The transition will also help save lives by freeing up airwaves for better first-responder radio service.

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Information about covering the DTV transition can be found in the FCC’s Media Tool Kit at http://www.dtv.gov/media_toolkit.html.